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# **Narrative as a tool for critical reflective practice in the creative industries.**

## **Abstract**

This paper explores the efficacy of narrative in reflective practice across a range of creative disciplines. As practitioners within the creative industries the authors internalise experience and re-contextualise it as stories, designs, music videos, fiction and non-fiction films and dance. They are uniquely placed to examine narrative in critical reflection through the prism of their creative practice and in so doing offer insights into reconceptualising professional practice. The authors demonstrate how engagement with and reflection on and in their stories enables wider reflection. Their purpose in reflection is not just to learn from mistakes but to develop an epistemology of practice that enables them to apply rigorous academic inquiry to articulate their tacit professional knowledge and establish new methods for dealing with uncertainty in creative practice research.

Keywords: reflective practice; narrative reflection; creative practice; storytelling; critical reflection

## **Introduction**

The purpose of this paper is to provide a detailed analysis of critical reflective practice in action and demonstrate how narrative can function as a powerful tool for reflection across the diverse practices that make up the 2014 Doctorate of Creative Industries (DCI) cohort at Queensland University of Technology. The DCI is a professional doctoral program which combines coursework with academic research. Reflective Practice in Action (a coursework unit) provides the overarching framework in which participants are encouraged to identify critical incidents within their professional practice. Critical reflection is introduced as a methodological approach which forms the basis of data collection. Data is reported through the individual presentation of professional biography, located within the practitioner's site and field. Through the process of collaborative reflection the cohort identified narrative our common theme and our stories were presented as a collective presentation of data.

Examining the work of Donald Schön (1983) and the notion of a 'crisis of confidence' in the professions, practitioners begin to reflect on critical incidents and identify common narratives. Schön suggests that some practitioners *are* able to 'deal competently with the indeterminacies and value conflicts of practice' but that effective 'problem setting' is often outside the traditional body of professional knowledge (Schön, 1983, p. 19). Within the context of the DCI, reflection provides a pathway into critical analysis and problem setting required for academic rigour.

Reflective practice provides a way for practitioners to make sense of the nonsensical, and in the words of Christopher Johns, it gives us a 'voice to reveal what has been concealed, and those norms that compose the taken-for-granted' (Johns, 2006, p. 8). Being a reflective practitioner is about being mindful, 'being attentive to self within each unfolding moment with the intent to realise... [our]... vision of desirable practice' (Johns, 2006, p. 4). And as reflective practitioners we desire not just to improve our own practice but to effect positive change in our field.

Reflexivity is not just about probing practice; it is a means of taking control of one's own practice. Johns (2006) likens it to a journey from a place where professional practice is dictated by authoritarian others to a situation of practice determined by the self.

For Bolton (2010), narrative or storytelling is a powerful tool for reflecting on practice. Narratives can convey not just the experience but the underlying values of the storyteller. Critically reflecting on our stories can help us perceive previously undisclosed assumptions and further our ability to listen and interpret more widely. Bolton says that stories are powerful because they 'create humanly memorable and comprehensible structures such as narrative line...causality...and plot...' (G. Bolton, 2010, p. 203).

Storytelling as a tool for critical reflective practice comes with its own cautionary tale. Bolton warns that 'narrative-making can too readily be self-affirming, an attempt to create order and security out of a chaotic world' (G. Bolton, 2010, p. 205). She cites Hargreaves' (2004) concerns regarding the perceived legitimacy of story forms where the narrators are validated, redeemed or condemned within their stories.

As reflective practitioners we acknowledge that the stories we write are reconstructions of experience perceived from our individual ontological positions, combining memory and imagination. We show our hands as researchers and strive for authenticity in our narratives in an attempt to understand and improve our practice. We engage and reflect on and in our stories and share them with others to enable wider reflection. Our purpose is not just to learn from our mistakes but also to develop an epistemology of practice that enables us to apply rigorous academic inquiry to expose our tacit professional knowledge and establish new methods for dealing with uncertainty in our different practices. Narrative, as a tool for critical reflection within the academic context of the DCI, provides the means to connect to each other through our shared experiences. Transitioning to research is not without its own 'crisis of confidence' and sharing our critical reflections enables us to continue to build connections and develop our own meta-narrative of support and collaborative reflection.

For Johns (2006), narratives are constructed through several layers of dialogue where the conversation and thus the narrative is emergent. He describes the use of journals to dialogue with the self and the story to produce a text. Theoretical concepts are used to reflect on the text and add another layer of understanding as is guided reflection with trusted other(s). These reflections and dialogues are interwoven and reintegrated to help shape the narrative. The next level of dialogue occurs when the narrative is shared with invited readers. In this respect, the power of story lies as much with the listener as it does with the narrator. Johns says 'it requires people to be critically conscious of their own thinking so this does not corrupt the effort to find true meaning' (Johns, 2006, p. 36).

So as reflective practitioners we have chosen to demonstrate how storytelling provides an alternative lens through which to view our experiences and shed new light on our practice. Schön says ‘we are bound to an epistemology of practice which leaves us at a loss to explain, or even to describe, the competences to which we now give overriding importance’ (Schön, 1983, p. 20). We contend that story-ing our experience provides a window through the mirror and opportunity to add to the body of knowledge surrounding narrative as a tool for reflective practice. The literature surrounding critical reflection is mostly found within clinical or educational contexts. As practitioners within the creative industries we internalise experience and re-contextualise it as stories, designs, music videos, fiction and non-fiction films, dance or other strategies for communication. Our contribution is to both fields of creative and reflective practice in demonstrating the value of narrative to inform and improve professional practice.

Bolton (2010a) emphasises the importance of understanding how we and others construct our world through narrative and metaphor. She suggests that developing the ability to perceive how the world is constructed in this way will empower professionals to take responsibility for their practice and enable change (Bolton, 2010). In the examples that follow, a documentary filmmaker uses narrative to demonstrate how stories can frame you and guide critical reflection. A choreographer demonstrates how critical reflection in and on action can evoke narrative-driven physical dynamics to create audience empathy. A fashion practitioner reflects on an experience within the fashion supply chain to clarify a critical incident within her practice. An educator and screenwriting practitioner reflects on her narrative and identifies metaphors to offer an alternative perspective on her practice. A music video artist applies the theories of screenwriting and reflection to illuminate the conflicts between her core values and the predominant ideology within the music industry. As creative practitioners at the beginning of our research journey, these are our stories; all different yet connected by the common thread of narrative as tool for critical reflection.

### **Stories can frame you**

*by Colin Schumacher*

Documentary film maker and respected author Michael Rabiger suggests ‘Film making mirrors its own process and the process of the director’. (Rabiger 2008, 279)

Like most of you, my normal view of the world is an elliptical frame. As I scan the perimeter of what I can see (without moving my head) I see an elliptical frame. However, my film view of my creative practice, documentary-making, is a rectangular frame the director’s view, and ultimately the audience’s view. This rectangular frame highlights what is inside the frame, and excludes what I choose not to see, or show the audience in a particular shot. (See Figure 1) My reflective practice involves moving from my elliptical frame to the director’s frame, interchanging regularly, perhaps every minute while researching, shooting and editing. I swap between them, even in my nightmares, when my reflective practice anatomises irresolvable challenges.

[Insert Figure 1]

At a particular stage of production, generally after the first interview with the subject – the protagonist, an intersection of both frames occurs. Sometimes happily. Often not.

Documentarian and anthropologist Jay Ruby states:

‘To be reflexive is to structure a product in such a way that the audience assumes that the producer, the process of making, and the product are a coherent whole. Not only is the audience made aware of those relationships, but it is made to realise the necessity of that knowledge’. (Ruby 1980, 277)

To describe my practice I borrow from Christopher Johns Model for Structured Reflection in *Becoming a Reflective Practitioner* (Johns, Burnie, Lee, Brooks, & Jarvis, 2013, 47). My documentary reflective practice innovates from his cyclical flow. The Documentary Reflective Spiral illustrates the reflective practice of spiraling upwards into more refined processes, as the documentary production process investigates further research, further interviews with the protagonist, and further cut-ins and cut-aways necessary to story the protagonist’s story. (See Figure 2)

[insert Figure 2]

This spiral continues further, as the post-production phase commences from the first rough-cut assembly into the final cut readying for audience screening. The metaphor of a passenger plane spiraling upwards ‘seeking cleaner air’ is likened to the documentary reflective spiral process. Rather than repeating the same Johns ‘cyclical model’ that suggests a return to the very beginning, the Documentary Reflective Spiral begins with:

#### *FRAME 1. The Influencing Factors*

- This includes my detailed research of the subject and context
- Interview questions
- Creating a comfortable, safe interview atmosphere for protagonist and crew
- Expecting the unexpected!

#### *FRAME 2. Could I Have Dealt With It Better?*

- Did I get the footage I needed?
- Did the protagonist open-up to me and the camera?
- Do I need to re-shoot? Ask additional questions?
- I then plan to shoot B-roll shots. These are prompted by the protagonist’s interview responses, and includes:
  - cut-ins and cutaway shots of the protagonist
  - vox pops – comments by other participants or observers.
- I story their story with the integrity s/he and the audience deserves.

#### *FRAME 3. Learning*

- What has the protagonist taught me and the audience?
- Do I care enough?
- Can I accurately ‘story the protagonist with integrity’? If not, why not? If yes - how?

#### *FRAME 4. Description of the Experience*

- Do I have a story? What is that story? Is there a pivotal moment?
- How do I feel? How does the audience feel?
- Is more research required?

#### *FRAME 5. Reflection*

- What strategies are needed to develop the story?
- What and when are the moments of gold? (Key moments of the interview).
- When do I care the most?
- Facts versus feelings?

This documentary reflective cycle continues upwards into the second and third interviews and shoots; reshaping into a spiral, as the narrative refines and reaches the end of post-production.

Actively reflecting on the voice of each subject, I story their story. (See Figure 3)  
[insert Figure 3]

During a recent interview with Nam (pseudonym), an 11yr old student, she sang a classic Thai song. We didn't fully understand the Thai lyric, but were deeply affected by her tone and expression. My documentary crew of Japanese and Australians began to weep. Later in our interview we discovered that the lyric described Nam's life. She ached for her divorced mother and father she had never met. As a result, I reframed the documentary, deciding to break the fourth wall, and Nam sings directly to the audience. Her plight and success shapes the film into a more subjective frame. (Reflecting upon a specific moment in the documentary making process)

Bolton suggests: 'Writing, exploring, and discussing our essential narratives is a route to taking responsibility and control of our lives, professional and personal' (Bolton 2010, 204). I seek to story my protagonist's story with integrity. In post-production my critical reflective practice continues, assembling the shots of various narrative arguments into order and a coherent film. I frame the story as it frames me. I move the story forward, the story....moves you.

#### **Stories can move you** *by Grant McLay*

Stories can make you laugh, make you cry, play with your emotions, whisk you away on a journey that only your unique imagination can create or simply remind you of love or loss. Patricia Leavy (2008, 25) writes that 'telling, retelling, writing and re-writing are fundamental parts of social life and our study of it'. As a dance practitioner I call myself a storyteller as I express stories through physical movement and draw on what Deidre Sklar (1991, 199) calls 'kinesthetic empathy' which describes 'the mode of apprehending kinetic qualities' that the audience experiences when watching dances. Rather than conveying a literal narrative, dance has the ability to impart a multitude of possible stories that are evoked by the witnessing of movement unfolding and which allow the audience his/her own interpretation.

In developing a reflective mindset, I am following in the impressive footsteps of other dance practitioners and dance writers such as Twyla Tharp and Carol Brown. Karen Barbour writes in her book *Dancing across the Page* that she didn't want to 'waste precious time on diligently crafting more academic, third person and disembodied text' (2011, p. 47). These words helped define her writing voice and in particular the word 'disembodied' gave me my 'Aha' moment or what could be called a 'critical incident'. This turning point allowed me to develop a writing voice that can reflect on past-action, in-action and future-action (Schön, 1983).

A dancer's body is full of narratives or embodied stories, engaging in kinesthetic states that unfold body intelligence through muscle memory. They accumulate intrinsic tacit knowledge through movement patterns, which they encounter in their practice. So, experimenting with the idea of physical embodied stories in a recent work, I wondered if I could create a narrative driven physical movement.

Merleau-Ponty (1962, 76) says 'the body is the vehicle of being in the world' and identifies the perspective of the lived body. In the reflexivity of using narrative to unpack this lived experience, it seems that I am trying to find an embodied way of writing; of finding my voice to illuminate the complex and sophisticated physical experience of the choreographic process and my practice. Phillip Chambers (2003) like Bolton (2010) agrees that the practitioner can benefit from writing and reflecting so that others can read and interpret through their own cognitive schemas. Through narrative reflexivity my own practitioner's voice can be witnessed and hopefully understood.

These images are from a piece I created in 2012 for the third year QUT dance students, called 'Conversation in Movement'. During the conception stage and choreographic process I was working in what Donald Schön (1983, 114-118) describes as 'ladders of reflections'. This describes how movement is created and then reflected or re-evaluated in relation to the contextual flow and aesthetic form. After this, there is a response to that reflection, thus continuing the cyclical process.

During the choreographic process as well as the performance itself, I asked the dancers to hold a linear story in their minds. The initial idea was a wonderful dinner party and we work-shopped the idea of how the evening would unfold. There would be the first greetings, conversations would be polite, there was a little underlying tension in the group between someone's previous disagreements a few days earlier; stories would be told, some would make you laugh, while some upset certain people in the group; finally, there would be a few heated debates. And so on...

I asked the first dancer, Lynn (pseudonym), to move her left hand as if it was starting a conversation while the right hand was listening. The specific lighting invited the audience into a more personal space, in order to lead the observer into their own internal narrative. (See Figure 4)

[Insert Figure 4]

The conversation goes back and forth. A story is told/ a response is heard/ the story continues. After a while I needed to gently bring another voice into the conversation. So enter the third person in the form of just a hand, asking really? The detail movement of the fingers was then a metaphor for a complex exchange with the hands touching as a sign of agreement. (See Figure 5)

[Insert Figure 5]

I was hoping at this point that the audience would have already started their own internal story triggered by the movement. This story developed by the observer could emerge from simply reading the male and female dancers touching, or maybe seeing the sensitivity of touch from the male dancer, or indeed being aggravated by the manipulation of the female dancer by the male. The ‘dinner party’ is in full flight now with hands/ arms/ feet/legs/ head/elbows all involved in the conversation. This allowed for the formation of duets, trios and quartets which in turn increased the movement vocabulary. (See Figure 6)

[Insert Figure 6]

Although I had a strong narrative through line in order to maintain a logical progression for the creation of the work, the audience most likely did not understand this exact story. Rather than trying to impart an obvious narrative (with characters, costumes and props) this work was movement based and somewhat abstract. Yet, if this maelstrom of choreographic stimulus each choreographer embeds in his/her work allows for a hidden story to emerge in the mind of the observer, then regardless of whether complex physical movement is understood by the viewer these stories will be influenced and made sense of by individual schemas where no two will be the same. As Johns (2006) points out, the power of the story lies as much with the audience as it does with the storytellers. The audience is encouraged to *make sense out of chaos*.

## **Stories can help make sense out of chaos**

*by Lauren Solomon*

During my professional work in wholesaling for a multinational fashion conglomerate, I began to identify a disconnect in the supply chain between third world producers and first world companies that prioritized profit. During this time I began questioning the imbalance between labour-intensive jobs in developing countries and the accumulation of capital in First World countries. Consequently I began investigating alternative models of fashion production. This led to working for a socially oriented charity and business in ethical fashion in their headquarters in London; however their focus is on the impoverished nation Malawi which is where their training and production workshop is based.

During my professional work I experienced many problematic supply chain issues and struggled to deal with them from a different continent. In 2012 I went on a production and sourcing trip to Malawi, Africa. Enthusiastic and slightly naïve I was eager to go in ‘guns a blazing’, I was going to solve our supply chain issues and nothing was going to stop me.

A morning trip to the fabric markets in the capitol of Malawi was interrupted by a phone call from the workshop. One of our tailors had collapsed the previous day and was rushed to hospital. We learn he has been diagnosed with cerebral malaria and are told that he won’t receive any food at the hospital; so we go to the shops and collect supplies and make the drive out of town to the hospital. Walking hesitantly through empty corridors, passing dirty ward rooms with a stench which was hard to forget, I shudder as I begin to wonder how many mothers have died giving birth here or have not even made it to the hospital. When we finally find our



tailor he lays weakly in bed in his worn casual clothing and a simple drip in his arm. We cannot find any medical staff to talk with. Surrounded by his wife and children, we don't stay for long, it feels like a private moment which us 'foreigners' are interrupting.

We drive back to the workshop. There has been a power outage all morning. It is 35 degrees and there is no relief from the heat. I begin working with the production manager and remaining tailors. We are sampling a new collection for one of our clients and have a strict deadline to make. I spend the afternoon with a tailor who sews beautifully however he can't read and speaks little English, the garment patterns are complex and the English instructions make the teaching process difficult.

Finishing up for the day I go to grab my bag. The zipper is open which is odd. It has been rifled through and all my money has been taken. The frustration is bursting inside me. The next day we get a call saying the tailor in hospital is doing better. We sigh with relief and are then asked to pay for his medical bills by the family. (Edited excerpt from personal diary entry)

In Malawi the challenges I encountered were complex and unstructured. No amount of training or work experience had prepared me for these situations. I tried to remove myself from any personal reflection to cope with the severity of the situations and limit any emotional response.

A month after I returned from Malawi I felt the urge to write and once I started I couldn't stop. What I produced was a messy, personal account of my professional experience. It was a non-linear piece of random memories, thoughts and ideas. It was full of frustration as I tried to resolve complex issues; however I was surprised when I finished how a strong sense of hope and purpose emerged.

Bolton suggests that narrative 'develops and creates values and a sense of self purpose' (Bolton, 2005, p. 205). This clearly resonated with my own experience, my narrative allowed me to understand my purpose. Even though I didn't understand the theory at the time behind my actions this example of narrative reflective practice formed what Bolton (2005) refers to as a critical incident. I gained clarity within the narrative and identified that I needed to become a researcher and problem solver. This experience enabled me as du Preez (2008) recognizes to 'locate the researcher in the research' (du Preez, 2008, p. 509).

Using narrative 'as a medium for facilitating understanding and generating new knowledge' (Chambers, 2003, p. 403), I began to distance myself from the personal experience. As Bolton reiterates I was able to make my world appear unfamiliar (Bolton, 2005). Equipped with this new knowledge I took myself on a new journey into the Doctorate of Creative Industries.

Starting post graduate studies I began the process of learning how to write in an academic context after being in the professional field. The process was extremely challenging and when I finally produced a coherent academic abstract I was once again surprised with the outcome. By reflecting on the 'plot' and narrative which emerged within the piece, I began to pinpoint how I could tackle my research question. I could clearly see my position as a researcher and make sense of how to move forward. A new narrative began to develop within my research.

Narrative reflective practice has become an important part of my journey so far and will continue to inform my research. Narrative has the ability to surprise even the author, by uncovering new meaning. It will allow me to discover purpose, develop clarity, create meaning out of chaos and change perspective.

### **Stories can enable a shift in perspective**

*by Susan Cake*

I have found my perspective shifting on a regular basis as I transition from teaching screen and media production within vocational education to researching screenwriting within the Doctorate of Creative Industries. As part of the collaborative process we shared research and thus it was from the discipline of business management that I read an article called *Telling Tales* by Stephen Denning(2004). In the article Denning describes the power of storytelling to bring about changes within an organisation. He says sharing an emotionally charged story about a difficult work situation can be a powerful tool to foster collaboration by generating a common narrative around a common goal. With this in mind, I reflected upon the circumstances that led me to begin my research journey.

Changes were occurring in my workplace and, at the same time, my Mum was undergoing huge changes as she battled cancer. At work, my colleagues were being systematically *excised* with no replacements to fill the gaps. Courses were being *cut*, contact hours dropped as the fees went up and we were facing *termination*. The new stories whispered in the corridors at work did not include us and we knew we were being written out. As much as the *toxic* work culture was eating away at me, the cancerous cells were chewing through Mum's bones at a rate of knots. Mum was slowly being dismantled: her breasts, her jaw, her leg. Daily she fought pain and to keep positive. She always asked me about work and say, "You look sad. You need a change." It was easier to blame work and the things that were happening there than discuss the cancer or how much time Mum had left. I took time off to help Dad nurse Mum at home through her last weeks and to get some relief from what was happening in my team. During this time away, I spoke to a counselor who helped me reflect on my work situation and I started to imagine a different story for myself.

Reflecting on what I've written I notice that the metaphors I've used to describe my work situation mimic the language of surgery, illness and death. Bolton says 'metaphor is a frame through which we perceive, understand and feel' and that it provides a powerful way of articulating meaning and making the abstract more tangible (G. Bolton, 2010, p. 221). The language or metaphors we use in our practice can have a powerful influence on how we envision it. They can be destructive or empowering. Bolton suggests metaphor can enable us to make the familiar strange to facilitate more critical reflection.

The notion of strangeness triggered my memory of this passage from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*.

Full fathom five thy father lies;  
Of his bones are coral made;  
Those are pearls that were his eyes:  
Nothing of him that doth fade  
But doth suffer a sea-change

Into something rich and strange.  
Sea-nymphs hourly ring his knell:  
Ding-dong.  
Hark! now I hear them,--ding-dong, bell.

I take comfort from these words and how beautifully they portray death: not as the corruption of the body, but as a transformation into something different. Change can seem like a death sometimes. It takes imagination to see beyond the uncertainty, to see it as 'rich and strange'.

How does storytelling relate to critical reflective practice? When we are overwhelmed by uncertainty it can imagine *for* us to see beyond the immediate crises we face in our professional practice. We can ask, what if? Play out scenarios within the safe confines of a beginning, middle and end. We can be the hero of our own journey where we win or lose the day or just process the experience. We can take on the role of a different character to change perspective or develop empathy. For me, I started to ask What if...?

And so begins a new chapter. I am enriched by this strange new world of academia. The challenge scares me at the same time as it sizzles through my synapses and reanimates the way I view my practice. (I notice I've used the defibrillator metaphor!) My professional practice as a teacher and writer is not fading but transforming. I am moving closer to what Johns refers to as 'being in-place - the place where I need to be to realise my vision as a lived reality' (Johns, 2006, p. 8).

Using narrative as a tool for reflection led me to write two poems. One mimics the form of *Full Fathom Five* to reflect on grief. The second poem evolved from reflecting upon our collaborative presentation. Our individual narrative reflections enabled me to perceive a meta-narrative that connects us to our practice, to each other and to our collective experience as researchers within the Doctorate of Creative Industries. In this respect, narrative can illuminate the essence within our practice.

### **Stories can illuminate the essence within our practice**

*by Kate O'Sullivan*

McKee proposes 'Story isn't a flight from reality but a vehicle that carries us on our search for reality, our best effort to make sense out of the anarchy of existence' (McKee 1997, 12).

When neck deep in a problem, a complication, an obstacle, or perhaps a research question, the application of narrative reflective practice has focused and informed me on more occasions than I can count. It has become a part of my routine, and is a key part of my creative process. Narrative reflective practice has enabled me to step away from the subjective perspective and look through a more reflective objective lens where I have gained valuable insight as well as useful pain saving foresight.

A habit I developed early in my life was a propensity for being consumed by detail, which would often lead to drowning in it. Reflecting on this habitual state, I have found I created situations where I was blind to the core essence of the situation and/or story. I was overwhelmed by details.

In response to this observation I have taught myself to ask, *what is the heart that pumps the blood around the body of the story, situation, production, shoot, piece of assessment?* (All of which I see as different kinds of stories).

Bolton claims that ‘reflecting upon and beginning to understand the role of narrative in our lives, can develop practical wisdom from experience, and our ability to listen and perceive widely’ (Bolton 205). I have found this to be very true.

There are an abundance of principles of story writing that I have found to be invaluable tools to draw upon, not only for the craft of writing for screen, but also to fuel critical reflective practice through narrative.

When defining story and separating it from everyday life or creating mere ‘collage’, McKee determines the difference unflinchingly:

‘A story must abstract from life to discover its essences, but not become an abstraction that loses all sense of life-as-lived. A story must be like life, but not so verbatim that it has no depth or meaning beyond what’s obvious to everyone on the street.’ (McKee 1997, 25)

Theme is a tool that can help focus your work, making it a coherent design organized around a single idea or human quality and offer succinct insight (McKenna & Vogler 2011, 1). Distilling and refining the theme of a specific project and letting it become the driving force makes a whole series of choices easier and clearer. ‘The work begins to feel organic, coherent, interconnected, and purposeful, more like a living being, organised around a common spine and central nervous system’ (McKenna & Vogler 2011, 3).

McKenna and Vogler also urge storytellers to develop the inner emotional journey of their protagonists. They say this provides the audience with gratifying insight, not just into the hero but into themselves. When I reflect upon this important concept, I notice my own capacity to get lost and overwhelmed by my emotional or psychological inner journey which can lead to my dislocation from the outer world of action. The danger here is I remain lost in the ethereal; disconnected from the physical, the here and now—and then may blindly follow an outer-goal that is in conflict with or not attached to inner-needs and values. This can then lead to a shallow, insubstantial conclusion, falling far short of transcendence.

A cinema audience can recognize when they are watching an archetypal protagonist in fierce pursuit of an outer goal which conflicts with their inner need. Similarly, I became the audience to my own story of blindness which was in complete opposition to this archetypal hero: I was stuck in my inner world and unseeing of my outer. A personal example that reflects the common occurrence of these competing tensions happened recently.

I was asked to direct a music video that already had a developed, highly detailed treatment. For the first time in my career I was given an ultimately unlimited budget and wage for the job. But, the treatment was clichéd, predictable, and in bad taste. I had a strict, very short timeline to commit to the project. I tried re-adjusting the treatment, changing its genre, turning it in to a parody of itself, but no matter

the surface changes, the core essence of the story was one that I deeply disagreed with, both socially and ethically. To say no to the job would mean burning some industry bridges, turning down the chance of relieving financial instability, and the opportunity of giving well paid employment to colleagues in need. Despite all of this, I could not accept the job. I could not be a part of a story whose core theme was so deeply misogynistic.

Hauge describes the inner journey as a path from living fully within identity to returning fully to essence (living one's truth with everything to lose) (Hauge 2002, 58). Reflecting upon this particular experience helped illuminate my core values that were in conflict with the predominant ideology.

Being equipped with the tool to aid objective observation which guides me to distil and illuminate the true essence of a project, has given me the strength to identify works that conflict with my inner journey and further the conviction to overcome many and varied hurdles, to learn and hopefully transform because of the experience of making mistakes and also making difficult decisions.

## **Conclusion**

Bolton suggests that understanding how we each story our professional lives can be empowering and facilitate change. She urges, 'we need a clearer perception of how we build our world, and how others build it around us: its narrative and metaphoric structures and content' (G. Bolton, 2010, pp. 208-209). As researchers we use narrative as a means of reflecting on and in our practice; storying ourselves into clarity of thought and understanding that allows us to reflect, share and grow.

We have shown how a documentary filmmaker strives for integrity and authenticity in his work through using story to frame his practice. A choreographer has provided insight into how the body can internalise and embody empathy communicated through intricate movements that move the viewer. Storying her experience has allowed a fashion practitioner to find order within chaos and engage with complex ethical issues that litter the path towards sustainable practice. Analysing the language of metaphor in storytelling has enabled an educator and screenwriter to shift perspective and embrace changes in her practice. Using the principles of storytelling for the screen has enabled a music video artist to illuminate core values which help her engage with her practice.

Although our individual stories are unique our experiences are deeply connected. By examining our own narrative and reflecting, we can see how our personal stories intersect with our professional journey. We begin our research journey within the Doctorate of Creative Industries open to many possible destinations. Using narrative to reflect on our creative practice grounds us and challenges us. It forces us to perceive authenticity which will guide us and enable us to maintain the veracity of our research. Through narrative reflection we can explore alternative paths, remain open to different possibilities and develop a methodology for engaging with our practice with both imagination and integrity. We examine, question, explore and untangle our research and as a collective we continue to create a new robust story, a meta-narrative, which connects us to our practice and to each other.

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